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MORNING EXERCISES IN THE FRANCIS W. PARKER SCHOOL

JENNIE HALL

I. A REPORT OF MORNING EXERCISES

To the teachers of the Francis W. Parker School the morning exercises seem the most valuable work of the day. That period is sacred to the largest and best aims of the school, to the furthering of good fellowship among its members—good fellowship, that is, in all its phases from mere comradeship to an intellectual and moral co-operation in doing some piece of social work.

All the school, from the kindergarten through the twelfth grade, meets in the assembly hall at eleven o'clock. That time was chosen because some break in the regular work was necessary then, and because it was an hour convenient for the visits of friends and parents.

The exercises always begin with a song by the entire school. Usually there follows a short reading of verse or prose by a teacher. Then some class or group of pupils tells the school of some piece of work recently done. As an example we will describe an exercise about Eskimos given by the first grade. One child showed a clay model of an igloo, and explained the purpose of the long passage, gave the dimensions of the house, and told the process of building. Another child showed models of the furniture and utensils and explained their uses. Someone else had made a picture of a man catching a seal, and told the story of the capture and the later uses of the animal. Other children played Eskimo games for the audience to see. So twenty minutes were filled with interesting models, pictures, oral recitation, and dramatic representation.

This conception of the morning exercises grew up at the Chicago and Cook County Normal School with Colonel Parker.

There five hundred children and three hundred grown people met in a large room. With so large and so varied an audience, where, despite all efforts, there could not be a class acquaintance throughout the school, the meeting naturally took on a certain formality. There were not enough mornings in the year for everyone to have an opportunity to contribute; therefore the children could not form the habit of free public speaking. Moreover, the large hall was difficult to fill with the voice; and consequently, in order to make it possible for everyone to hear, it was necessary for these unaccustomed children to be drilled before the exercises in loud, clear speaking of what they had to say. Twenty minutes was all too short a time for a group of forty children to express itself; so the period was crowded full of this prepared work, and there was no opportunity for the audience to do anything but listen. The making ready of such exercises required much time and work; and, in consequence, the custom grew up of assigning mornings a month in advance to different teachers.

Such was the morning exercise in the Chicago and Cook County Normal School—a thing characteristic and inspiring. Colonel Parker's own words best describe it, and express, besides, the esteem in which the institution was held by his teachers and pupils: "In the morning exercises the entire school meets together for twenty minutes each day, and all the good things of class and grade are poured into the larger life of the whole school. Every subject presented to the assembled society should grow out—be, in fact, the efflorescence of the life in class and grade. Nothing should be in any way extraneous to the intrinsic movement of the school. There must be no attempt at show or mere exhibition. I have said that the morning exercises should spring from the work of the school, representing every class and grade from the kindergarten to the twelfth grade inclusive. All preparation should be made with care and deliberation; nothing should be done hurriedly. All preparation should be in the best literary and art forms. The morning exercises may be made the best period, educationally, of the day."

When the Francis W. Parker School was founded, its teachers

brought from the old Normal School not only a veneration for the morning exercises, but so strong a habit of having them that they were as essential to the idea of a school as was a curriculum. And they found their new pupils willing co-operators. In this little school, of perhaps a hundred and fifty people in its early days of unhabitual action, the morning exercises was at first a crude thing, but a pleasant one—a family meeting. But slowly, unaccountably, the attitude changed. After three years we awoke to find that many children were unwilling to appear before the school; that frequently a large part of the audience was inattentive; that occasionally there seemed to be a critical, almost unfriendly, attitude among the listeners; that sometimes an exercise did not ring true with genuine social action on the side of the participants. And yet such bald statements exaggerate the situation. Rather, these were fears on the part of the teachers instead of being established facts. Our morning exercises still seemed the most precious part of our program. But feeling that they were on a dangerous road, we began earnestly to consider the question. Every teacher who had a morning in charge made a special effort to choose an interesting and valuable piece of work, to plan carefully, and to give sufficient time for working out the exercises. Different seating arrangements were tried. The general idea and purpose of the morning exercises were discussed with the older children. Faculty meetings were given over to the consideration of the problem. But none of these actions had the desired result. Dissatisfaction grew. At last a committee was appointed from the teachers to work for the improving of the morning exercises. After many meetings and much discussion, this committee made a report to the faculty, outlining what seemed to the members the fundamental principles upon which the morning exercise idea and practice are based. This report was made merely for the purpose of directing discussion, and is of no value here. What is important is the later result of the thinking of the whole school. This paper is a new report from the committee upon that result.

The reason for the conditions was the first thing to seek.

Probably the difficulty at the base of the situation was that the type of morning exercises which had naturally evolved at the Normal School had been transplanted whole into quite different conditions. What the big school had needed was a meeting where people might learn what was going on in the school at large. What this small school needed was an opportunity to meet as a family and talk over common interests. The formal exercises, where one grade did all the talking, and that talking about its own work, seemed out of place, stiff, and unfriendly; so there had grown a cutting-off of listener from speaker, a habit of expecting to be entertained, a demand for finished, elaborate productions. Along with this growing disrespect for simplicity had come the lack of confidence about presenting oneself before the audience, which we have already mentioned. When the teachers once felt that they had the explanation of the situation, it was possible to act. We needed, both teachers and children, to get back to an understanding of first principles. Those principles were discussed in faculty meetings, and then the committee submitted them to the pupils for discussion at a town-meeting. From that meeting the teachers learned that the morning exercises, despite mistakes, were almost unanimously considered the pleasantest and most valuable part of the program, a precious thing, worth almost any sacrifice. The discussion was kept to constructive suggestion rather than criticism. And under all these suggestions showed a desire for less formality, for a return from the difficult thing that we had all together helped to produce, to the simple thing natural to the conditions. At the end of this meeting the children elected from among themselves a committee to act with a like committee from the faculty in following out suggestions already made in this meeting, and to plan further changes. As the result of the work of these committees, the following changes have been made:

Mornings are no longer assigned to teachers. Any person in the school, teacher or pupil, who wishes to give a morning exercise applies for time to the committee. Thus there is avoided the strain resulting from a division being forced to give a morning exercise whether the work has rounded itself to comple-

tion or not. Moreover, the feeling that it is rather a privilege than a duty to help in a morning exercise is emphasized. Plans for disposing of the unclaimed mornings have been suggested, but nothing has been adopted, because there is no present need, since all the exercises for two and a half months were eagerly taken.

The committee strongly advises that the prepared part of every exercise close five minutes before the end of the period, in order that the audience may ask questions or add contributions. When possible, the exercises should be planned with the purpose of encouraging such action on the part of the audience. It is of no effect to say: "Has anyone anything to add?" "Are there any questions?" The exercise itself must start new mental action, and then must give reason for expression. The people giving the exercises have sometimes asked help from the audience on questions too difficult for themselves to handle. One phase of the subject upon which the class is not fully prepared may be thrown open to the audience for discussion. As often as possible a theme of broad general interest is chosen for presentation, rather than one of limited appeal. To encourage general talking, the committee posts every morning the topic of the succeeding morning, that everyone may be considering it meantime.

The committee has made some definite efforts to bring the morning exercises into touch with the children's natural interest outside of the school. The members canvassed different grades, asking whether there were subjects about which the pupils would like to have exercises given. Airships, submarine boats, vacation experiences, Indians, and electricity were among the requests. Immediately six high-school boys, of their own initiative, took hold of the subject of airships, planned an exercise, executed drawings, and made an interesting presentation. It seemed to the committee, also, that the children's interest in collections might profitably express itself in exercises. On a chosen morning every child who may wish to exhibit his collection of stamps, coins, stones, pictures, or curios will bring it to school and set it up in some place. There will be different rooms for the different kinds of collections. People who wish to see

exhibits of coins will go to the coin-room, those who wish to see stamps will go to another room. This plan has the added advantage of breaking grade lines and bringing together children of different ages into small sociable groups. At such times, in order to maintain the emphasis on the unity of our big family, we shall all meet in the assembly hall for a song and reading before separating into the different groups.

The newly interested audiences, the eager participants, the free discussion, the comfortable feeling, the general co-operation toward making the morning exercise period a valuable and pleasant one, make us all feel that at last our exercises have taken the right trend, toward informal family expression, and that our great task is to guard them from becoming formalized.

II. TWO TYPICAL MORNING EXERCISES

The following is a typical morning exercise by the second grade:¹

MORNING EXERCISE

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1905

Singing of an opening hymn.

Reading of "Alice's Supper," by Miss Hall.

PAUL (second-grade child): Last year the first grade planted oats. The first time we planted them we didn't cover them up with earth at all. The second time we planted them we left them the same way, and then the third time we planted them and covered them up with earth, and then they came up. The two times before they didn't grow at all. They grew the last time, and Mr. Hendry picked them. Then we made a flail, and we flailed them this way. That is to get the oats out of the shells. Then we put them in a great big piece of cloth, and four children took hold of the cloth and threw the oats up into the air, and the husks flew away. This is to get all the chaff out of the oats.

FOWLER (second-grade child): Reading of "Threshing in Italy," as follows:

¹ Reported verbatim by the school stenographer.

THRESHING IN ITALY

The threshing-floor is out of doors.
It is a flat place paved with stones.
The floor is covered with yellow corn.
The men are going to shell it today.
Four of them come with their flails.
The flail is made of two sticks of wood.
They are tied loosely together at one end.
Two men stand on each side of the threshing-floor.
They swing their flails over their shoulders.
Down they come on the corn—first this two and then that two.
Whack! Whack! sound the flails.
The yellow corn flies.
The white cobs peep out.
After a long time the men stop.
They take wooden forks.
They lift the corn and cobs.
The corn falls through the forks.
The cobs stay on.
The men throw them away into a pile.
But some cobs still have corn on them.
The men take up their flails again.
So they work until all the corn is off.
It lies in a clean, yellow pile.
On another day the men will thresh wheat in the same way.

HELEN (second-grade child): I read a story of how the Indians got rice, and this is the way they got it: They took their canoes and rowed down until they got to a place that was filled full of rice, and then they bent the stems of the rice over into the canoe. And they had baskets in the canoe, and they pulled all the kernels of rice off, and they fell into the basket, and when they got the baskets full they took them home.

RUSSELL (second-grade child): The second grade read a story of how they threshed wheat in Greece. They would have a floor, and they would have horses hitched in a ring going around, and they would squash the wheat out. And then they

would rake it up and throw it up with pitch-forks, and the chaff blows away and the wheat falls down. And then after that they take it and throw it onto a great big blanket, and women pick all the dirt out of it, and then they put it in bags.

MATILDA (second-grade child): The second grade made a lot of corn meal, and this is the meal (pointing to some jars on the table). We ground it with this coffee-mill. We are going to make corn-meal cakes.

MISS HALL: There are very few children in our grade who have seen modern threshing. We should be very grateful if someone would tell us how it is done; or, if you have seen some old-fashioned threshing, we should like to hear about that.

The following are spontaneous answers to Miss Hall's suggestion:

ELLIOTT (high-school boy): Two years ago, when I was out on a farm, they had two machines and a steam engine attached to the machines with belts. They put the wheat into the machines, and it made a great big pile of straw. The straw is used in winter for the cows.

WALKER (fifth-grade boy): When I saw them thresh, they had a lot of horses, and they made the machine go, and the grain came out of little funnels into bags. It wasn't a steam engine.

MYRON (sixth-grade boy): When I was in the country, we were going along, and we saw them threshing some wheat in a farm-yard, and we went in to watch them. A hay wagon would drive up beside the machine, and there were two men on each wagon and another that they kept there to load the wheat into the machine, and they shoveled it in as fast as they could with pitch-forks, and the kernels of wheat came out and fell into bags. The straw went up a kind of walking staircase and went into the barn. After a while they put buckets on, and the wheat fell into the buckets instead of into the bags, and the buckets carried it to a bin in the barn.

ELIZABETH (high-school girl): Last summer, when I was out in Lake Forest, I saw a silo. This is a big stone building, and they put in the green corn, stalks and all. After they put the corn in they put on a layer of dirt about three or four feet

deep, and then they put on a heavy cover made of stone that squashes it all down. It is perfectly air-tight. We didn't find out how they got the corn out.

OTTO (seventh-grade boy): I saw them threshing, and there was a rod about four feet long that had knives on it, and the rod revolved. It was driven by a cog and chain. The bundles were thrown in, and they had a chute that was worked by another cog that had points on it so as to catch them, and that took the bundles up past the knives, and the knives cut the strings on the bundles.

The following is a typical morning exercise by high-school boys, assisted by high-school girls:

A MUSICAL PROGRAM

DECEMBER 11, 1905

NOTE OF EXPLANATION BY MISS GOODRICH

The steady, strong interest which the boys showed in preparing this program was due largely to the influence of the twelfth grade and the three teachers who joined the class, and to the variety, novelty, and virility of the songs. These songs, with the exception of the Latin hymns, were studied in class time during the fall quarter. The Latin hymns were sung last year in a program of historical songs. Translations of the texts of the hymns, and of the principal rule for their performance, were made by the boys with the help of the Latin teacher. Two very beautiful mediæval manuscripts were shown to the class, as well as pictures of cathedrals and an old engraving of monks at service in the chancel. The boys went to the Newberry Library to examine mediæval books and facsimiles, and some of them have made large manuscripts for the music-room under Miss Clement's direction. All of this work was voluntary. The training involved in learning to sing these songs with accuracy as to pitch, attack, and pronunciation was less valuable than the result to the boys in genuine musical feeling and in respect for the work. The dignified manner in which they presented the program reacted appreciably upon the whole school.

PROGRAM ²

I "Media Vita," tenth century; "Veni Creator," ninth century.

2. "The Volga," Russian boat-song.
3. "The Piper," Bohemian folk-song.
4. "The Lone Prairie," American folk-song.
5. "Henry of Navarre," French folk-song.

MISS GOODRICH: The first two of these songs are Latin hymns; the rest are folk-songs.

CLARENCE: "Media Vita" was written by a monk in the tenth century. The monk was walking along a road one day and saw some men building a bridge in a very perilous position, and their danger brought to his mind these words. The translation is:

In the midst of life we are in death.
What aid do we seek, O Lord, except thine,
Who art justly angry at our transgressions?

MISS GOODRICH: At the time this was written they might have had a little crude organ, but they sang mostly without any accompaniment, and although it is a rather difficult thing to do, we are going to try to sing it in that way.

(Hymn sung by the boys.)

CLARENCE: The translation of the second song is this:

Come, Holy Spirit, visit our souls.
Fill with the highest gratitude
The breasts of those whom thou hast created.
Thou, who art spoken of as Paraclitus,
Most High God, living fountain,
Fire of youth, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

MISS GOODRICH: The rest are folk-songs, which have come from the people in a more or less spontaneous way and without scientific understanding of music. The first is a Russian boat-song:

² Reported by the school stenographer. The program was printed upon a blackboard.

On our Mother Volga's breast,
So proudly swelling,
The Volga, the Volga.
Dark waves are upward welling,
Winds no more rest,
On our Mother Volga's breast.

Rowers all pull lustily.
The boat flies faster
Adown the dark Volga.
There in the stern
The master calls cheerily:
"Rowers, all pull lustily!"

Then up spake our master brave,
Good Stjenke Rasin,
On the wide Volga:
"Pull, lads, as rowers should,
And sing merrily,
On the river Volga."

MISS GOODRICH: The next is a Bohemian song, in three parts, and will be sung by the boys and girls:

When the jolly piper plays his tune,
Be it morning, eve, or sunny noon,
All the folks from far and near
Gather round, his pipes to hear.
When the jolly piper plays his tune,
Be it morning, eve, or sunny noon.

When the piper pipes so merrily,
I would wander forth as glad and free.
Over rivers deep and wide,
Through the blooming country side.
When the piper pipes so merrily,
I would wander forth as glad and free.

Wondrous tales the piper knoweth well,
Tales his droning bagpipe loves to tell,

Tales of castles rich and old,
Kings and queens with thrones of gold.
Wondrous tales the piper knoweth well,
Tales his droning bagpipe loves to tell.

Piper, might I go with you along,
To your pipes I'd sing a pretty song;
Then together would we stray,
O'er the hills and far away,
While your pipe, and e'en my little song,
Made too short the way that else were long.

KENNETH: The next song is supposed to have been made up by the cowboys on the western plains, and is one of the few folk-songs that American people have:

O, bury me out on the lone prairie,
Where the wild coyote will howl o'er me,
In a narrow grave, just six by three.
O, bury me out on the lone prairie.

And they buried him there on the lone prairie,
Where the coyote howls and the wind goes free,
In his narrow grave, just six by three,
And they buried him there on the lone prairie.

CHESTER: The next song is of Henry of Navarre, who was Henry IV of France. He was adored by the people of France, and they wrote this song entirely for his benefit, to do him praise:

Long live Henry, our glorious Henry Fourth!
Lord of high valor and monarch of true worth,
Conqueror invincible, hero of Navarre.
Let us praise him, Henry, king in peace and war.

Long live King Henry, our glorious Henry Fourth!
Lord of high valor, of laughter and of mirth,
Lover of revels, and blithe in peace and war.
Let us praise him, Henry, our hero of Navarre.

III. A HALLOWE'EN MORNING EXERCISE

OCTOBER 31, 1905

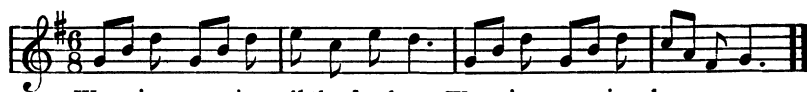
ELSA MILLER, TEACHER FIFTH GRADE

A story appropriate for dramatization for a Hallowe'en morning exercise was selected from the collection *Legendary Fiction of the Irish Celts*, by Patrick Henry. The legend is one named "Palace in the Rath." It appears in the Irish and Breton versions. The Irish version was used. It was simplified and much modified in presentation to the children. The story was first told to a fifth-grade class, which did considerable work in constructing a simple play and writing the necessary melodies. Each member of the class wrote a play.

To convey an idea of the story as it was presented, and at the same time to give an example of the work done by the children, the following is quoted :

THE HUNCHBACK

On the night of Hallowe'en a hunchback weaver is coming home from his work. He is very tired and sits down to rest awhile. He sings:



Weav-ing, weav-ing, all the day long; Weav-ing, weav-ing, hear my song.

He hears strange music that comes from the little people. He stops his own singing and listens to theirs. He looks around to find them and sees a great hole in the ground. There they are.

LITTLE PEOPLE:



Monday, Tuesday; Monday, Tuesday; Monday, Tuesday; Monday, Tuesday

WEAVER:



And Wednesday, too.

The little people come out of the ground.

LITTLE PEOPLE: So it is you! We are so glad you finished our song for us. We have been singing it this way so long, and we could not find anyone who would finish it for us. You have finished it. Now, we are so grateful to you that we will give you a wish that will be sure to come true.

HUNCHBACK: I am so glad I could finish your song for you. I know what I wish already.

LITTLE PEOPLE: What is your wish?

HUNCHBACK: I wish that I were just as straight and tall as other men.

LITTLE PEOPLE (*take hold of hands and dance around and around him until he is just as straight and tall as other men*): Your wish has come true.

Further to intensify the feeling for the Irish fairy and give the children an idea of the Irish customs on May Day and Hallowe'en, selections from "Land of Heart's Desire" were read. The children recalled and recited poems and stories with which they were familiar, such as "Fairy Folk," by Allingham, and "The Brownie," by Graber-Hoffmann. "The Kildare Pooka" was also told, which may be found in the book of legends once before mentioned. More careful and intelligent work was done from day to day, until the point was reached where the class had contributed its best. A few children, however, wished to try to write the play in verse. This they found too difficult, and here they asked the teacher to contribute. Following is a copy of the play in its finished form:

A HALLOWE'EN PLAY

Characters: Hunchback Weaver, Fairy Queen, and Fairies. Scene: On a rath in Ireland.

HUNCHBACK (*gathering primroses in a basket*):

A black cat crossed my path tonight.

Misfortune follows me.

A weaver works and sings all day,

Why should he unhappy be?

I ran across the fields and raths,
 I must not linger long,
 For the good folks come when the moon is high
 To find the paths where the primroses lie
 That lead to each man's door.

If the fairies ask for aught in vain,
 Some trick unkind they'll play.
 A big, strong man need fear them not,
 But trifle with me they may.

(The hooting of an owl is heard.)

The good folks ask for milk and fire,
 And he who gives to them
 Is in their power for one long year;
 His heart is filled with dread.

(The hooting of the owl is heard again.)

What strange sounds!
 It may be the Pooka hidden hereabouts.

(The hooting is heard again.)

I must go. I must go.

(The hooting is heard again.)

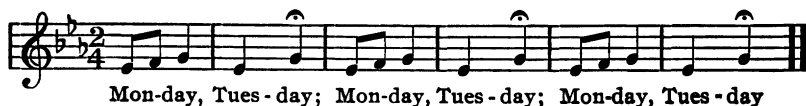
No wind sings tonight.

(The hooting is heard again.)

The hooting owl calls through the darkness.
 Strange that the night has come so soon!
 The bats are flying,
 And the sun is hardly set.

(Singing is heard. Chorus of fairies behind scenes sing the "Barley-Brownie," by Reinecke. Hunchback's fear increases. Fairies enter dancing.)

FAIRIES:



scenery. To add color, a large decorative lantern of Irish design, made by the children, was hung on either side of the stage.

The hunchback was dressed as a weaver, in a dark-blue frock and leather apron. To appear as a hunchback he bent his shoulders round and low. This seemed a more simple and natural way than using a clumsy make-up which would later be in the way. The fairies wore green jackets, red, white, or yellow tights or long stockings, and red caps with a white feather. The jackets were children's cotton shirts, dyed apple-green. These fitted closely and lent a sprightly look. The caps were ordinary red stocking caps stuffed with paper. At the top of each was fastened a soft white turkey feather. The fairy queen wore a small golden crown and carried a scepter.